

THE PRESENT SITUATION AND PROSPECTS OF “SPORT AND BUSINESS CENTRE VOJVODINA” (SPENS) FOR DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM AND SPORT EVENTS

by

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents contents, objects and events in terms of sports tourism in the government-owned corporation "Sport and Business Centre Vojvodina" (so called *SPENS*) in City of Novi Sad (Vojvodina Province, Serbia). The *SPENS* is one of the most important tourism center and leading provider of sports and business events in Serbia. We analyzed the attitudes of $\frac{3}{4}$ of the total number of employees in the sport's sector of the *SPENS* about technical, technological, physical, organizational and human resource components of sport events. The results show that the *SPENS* is suitable for the planning and implementation of major sporting events and represents significant part of the tourism offer of City of Novi Sad. Over 60% of respondents believe that the *SPENS* is very important to raise the sport's culture of the city. When it comes to sporting events variety of the *SPENS*, the highest percentage of employees evaluated this statement as good (3). Nearly 70% of respondents gave a rating of excellent (5) or very good (4) on the claim that the ticket prices to sporting events are favorable. The study also suggests that the *SPENS* faces a number of problems which caused considerable dissatisfaction among employee lately.

KEYWORDS

Tourism, Sport Events, Employees, *SPENS*, Novi Sad

INTRODUCTION

Sporting events are a wide social phenomenon of the modern civilization. By sporting event, we consider different activities of the organizer which are directed to the program offer and the athletes' performance to a certain sports audience in order to achieve a sport result (Getz, 2005; 2007a; 2007b). Sporting events can be viewed in a broader context where the achievement of a sport result is not primary, but its uncompetitive nature is being emphasized. In this sense, sporting events include recreation, relaxation and entertainment. Sporting events in wider sense are not studied in event management. Event management studies primarily sporting events where the competitive nature is clearly expressed, which are at the same time the basic characteristics of a professional, organized sport. Sporting events are

organized in order to meet the social needs of the visitors (Westerbeek et al., 2005). Modern sporting events become recognizable for the achievements of the individuals, teams and representations who won. According to Pivac and Stamenković (2010), in this way, sporting events attract the attention and the interest of a broad sports audience and the public, who represent the audience in both physical and information environment.

Sport is considered a specific industry, as its annual growth rates are high. It is estimated that there are \$350 billion realized in the sports industry (Baum et al., 2009). Global growth and development of the sports industry contributes to the overall economic development, as well as the opening of new work places. The development of sport management contributes to the profiling sport managers into qualified experts, who can plan, organize, manage and control sporting events (Hall, 1992; Silvers, 2004; 2008).

According to researches of Sorin (2003), Tum and Norton (2006) and Štetić (2007), organizing a modern sporting event which is appealing to the audience requires the existence and the interaction of the following essential elements: sport's facility, duration of the program, athletes, equipment, audience and accompanying products and services, which expand the tourist offer and the income of a certain sporting event. Matthews (2008) claims that depending on the size of the sporting event, the planning process can involve more or fewer activities, which are covered in each phase, the significant ones being: sport marketing research; determine the mission of the sporting event; the analysis of the sport offer and services and competition analysis.

Depending on the program and the type of competition, sporting events can be related in many different ways: *competitive*, *substitutive*, *complementary* and *independent*. The researches of Ali-Knight et al. (2008) and Getz (1991; 1997) show that it is significant for the sporting event managers to be familiar with the activities of their competitors in a certain environment of the sporting event, their strengths and weaknesses, their preferred sporting event management strategies, their sport offer structure and the way they communicate with the sports audience.

The government-owned corporation "Sport and Business Center of Vojvodina", popularly called *SPENS* is a sport and business center located in Novi Sad, near the town center. SPENS represents a complex which includes several sectors and rooms for various individual and collective sports competitions and trainings, with great potential in commercial marketing, developed hospitality industry and space for cultural and media events as part of the Novi Sad tourist offer. Being a location where numerous major national and international sporting events take place, SPENS is an important part of the Novi Sad and Serbia sporting events tourist.

CASE STUDY: SPORT'S FACILITIES AND EVENTS OF SPENS

The government-owned company SPENS is the largest sport and business center in Novi Sad and Vojvodina. The construction of this magnificent facility started in 1979, and the construction was completed next year (April 14, 1981). The first major sporting event took place at the opening of SPENS, World Table Tennis Championship (April 14 to 26, 1981). Today, SPENS covers the area of around 200.000 m², with the Vojvodina soccer stadium covering 32.483 m². The total usable area is 85.091 m², while the indoor usable area is 46.319 m². The SPENS facilities are: sport, congress, business, tourist and hospitality and cultural. There is a multitude of modernly equipped shops, banks, tourist agencies, bookshops, entertainment shops, fitness clubs, jewelry shops, etc. These company's business activities cover sports, culture, tourism, advertizing, congresses, press conferences, hospitality and office space for rent (these are the data acquired from the employees at the SPENS management). According to Dragičević et al. (2009; 2011), SPENS represents important congress opportunity for Novi Sad, as there are many sports related associations that hold congresses. The SPENS is also the host of one the most popular event in the city, called "Spring of Novi Sad", visited by more than 70,000 visitors per year (Petrović et al. 2011).

Several sport facilities at SPENS are worth mentioning: the Main hall, the Small hall, the Ice hockey rink, the Judo training hall, the Boxing training hall, the Table Tennis hall, the Wrestling training hall, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, the bowling alley, the shooting range, tennis courts and the Sport center *Sajmište* (www.spens.rs).

Apart from the facilities on SPENS some of the significant sport events are all worth mentioning (in chronological order), which have taken place since the very beginning of the company opening (Table 1).

TABLE 1
IMPORTANT SPENS' SPORT EVENTS (1981 - 2011)

Year	The name of the event
1981	The 36 th World Table Tennis Cup (so called SPENS)
1986	The 35 th European Judo Team Championship (so called YUNS)
1987	The Finale of the Cup of the European Cup Winners – <i>Cibona : Scavolini</i>
1990	The 9 th Chess Olympiad
1990	The exhibition tennis match – <i>Monika Seleš : Aranca Sancez</i>
1998	The Cup Finale of the European Champions in Men's Volleyball (<i>Final Four</i>)
1998	Junior Hockey Championship – group D
2003	The 46 th European Junior Table Tennis Championship
2004	The 1 st Wrestling Qualification Tournament for the 2004 Olympics
2005	Bowling World Cup (so called KUPS)
2005	European Basketball Championship, group D
2007	Junior Basketball World Cup
2009	<i>Universiade 2009</i>
2009	The 17 th Chess Team Championship
2010	The 12 th University Indoor Soccer World Championship
2011	The 38 th Junior and Cadets Karate European Championship

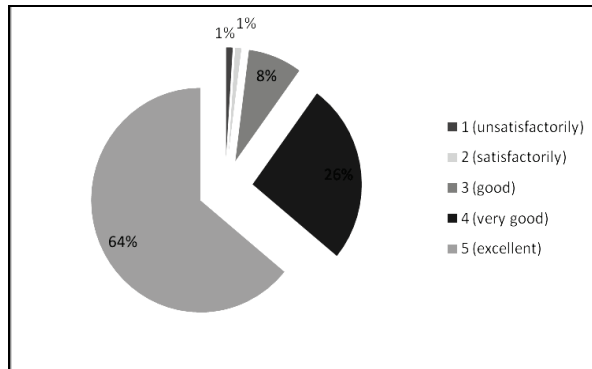
*According to data obtained from the employees in the SPENS.

It is obvious that the building covers a multitude of spatial and functional components (indoor and outdoor courts) for the realization of numerous types of sport and recreation activities. Furthermore, SPENS was a host to numerous major sporting events with national, European and Global significance and it is likely to be one in the future, as well. These facts suggest that SPENS is suitable for planning and executing numerous small but also major sporting events, according to its technical, technological, spatial, and organizational and staff capacity and functionality, which may attract a large number of tourists to Novi Sad.

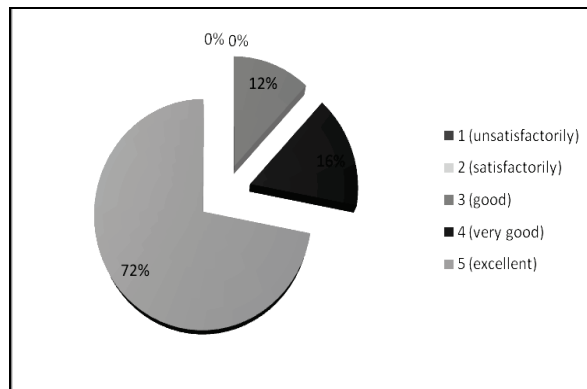
RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the survey distributed amongst the employees at the SPENS sport management, there were 25 respondents out of total 33 who are employed in that sector. The research goal was to examine the attitude of the employees on technical, technological, organizational and spatial components of the realization of sporting events on SPENS. The goal was also to define the current problems and potential solutions in the sport and tourism sector, in order to improve its tourism and sport events' offer of Novi Sad and Serbia.

**FIGURE 1
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT I**



**FIGURE 2
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT II**



Based on Fig. 1 (Statement I: "SPENS is of great significance in raising the Novi Sad sport culture") it can be concluded that over 60% of the employees think that the company is significant in raising the city awareness in sport. Almost every fourth respondent gave this statement 4, grading it as very good in significance, while fewer respondents think that SPENS is insignificant according to this criterion. There are only two employees who graded this statement 1 or 2. On the other side, Fig. 2 (Statement II: "There were where major sporting events take place is spacious enough to host a large number of visitors") evidently show that most of the respondents (seven out of ten respondents) consider SPENS to have enough capacity to host visitors to major sporting events. Fewer respondents completely disagree with the statement.

**FIGURE 3
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT III**

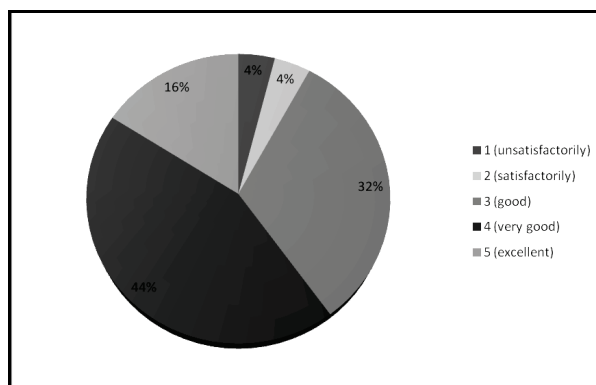
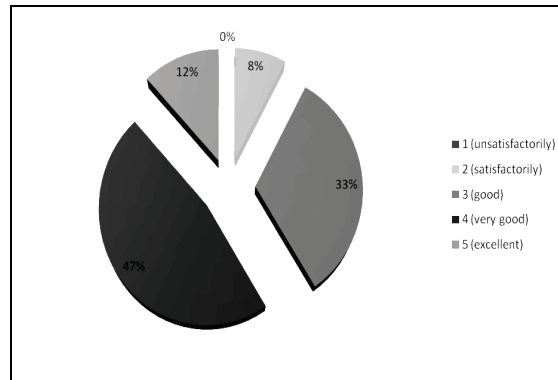


FIGURE 4
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT IV



Unlike the previous two figures, Fig. 3 (Statement III: "The spatial arrangement where major sporting events take place is satisfactory") shows that grades 3 and 4 are dominant in stating opinion about the spatial arrangement where major sporting events take place. Most employees think there are numerous visible problems when it comes to capacity, accessibility, hygiene and similar elements, which is what they stated under question 7 (the most common disadvantages and problems at SPENS).

Similar to the previous statement, based on Fig. 4 (Statement IV: "Visitors to sporting events behave correctly") it can be concluded that a total of 80% respondents graded the statement 3 or 4. Most of the employees think that visitor behave relatively correctly, while fewer respondents think that they behave excellently and satisfactorily. There are no respondents who gave this statement 1.

FIGURE 5
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT V

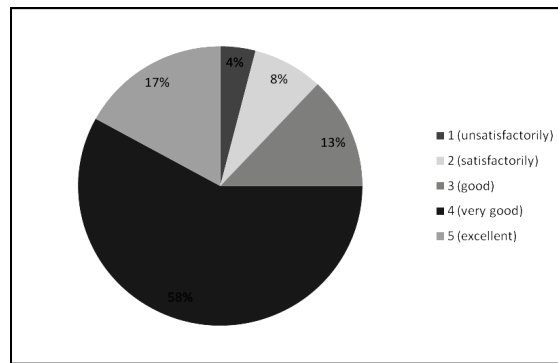
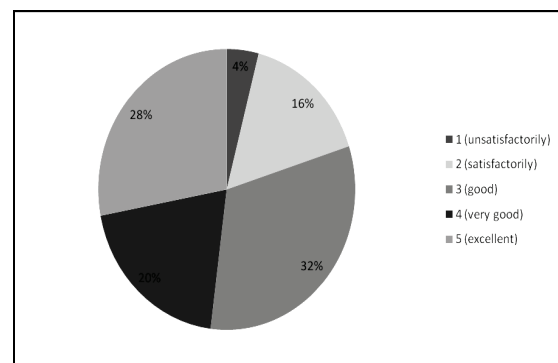
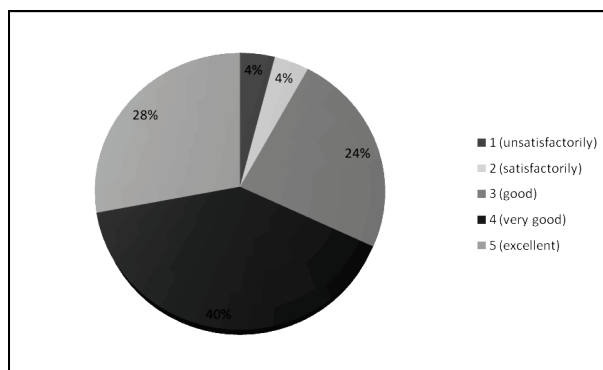


FIGURE 6
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT VI



Half of the respondents graded 4 the statement on the access o information about sporting events (Fig. 5), which suggests that most of the respondents think that access to information is satisfactory. Fewer respondents graded this statement lower or higher than 4. Fig. 6 shows a relatively similar opinion of the respondents when it comes to the SPENS sporting event offer diversity. Most of the employees graded this stetment 3, fewer graded 5, even fewer graded 4 or 2 and only a small number of respondents graded this statement 1, assessing the postt offer as unsatisfactory.

**FIGURE 7
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT VII**



**FIGURE 8
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT VIII**

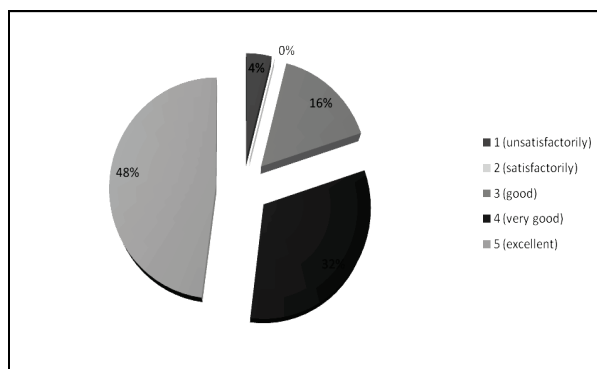
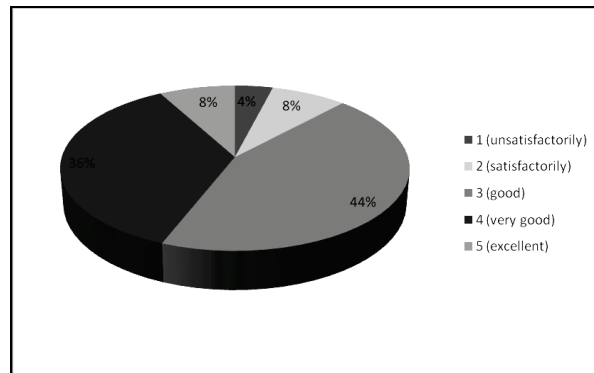
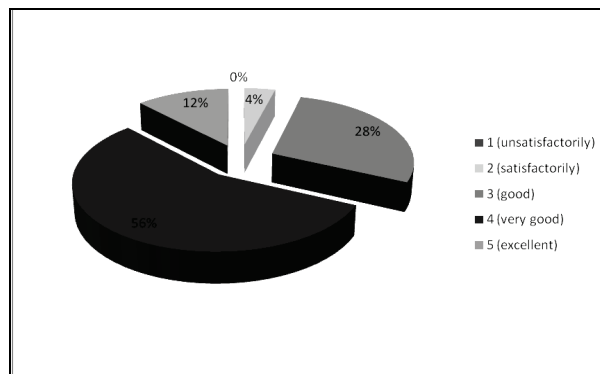


Fig. 7 shows that relatively high grades given for the statement on the sporting events ticket price (Stat. VII), considering that almost 70% of the respondents graded this statement 5 or 4, and 1/3 of the respondents graded this statement with lower grades. Similar to the previous results, Fig. 8 also shows a favorable image on the significance of sporting events for the improvement of the city tourist offer, according to the employees (Stat. VIII). Namely, eight out of ten respondents graded this statement 5 or 4 which suggests that the employees think highly of the significance of sporting events.

**FIGURE 9
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT IX**



**FIGURE 10
THE ASSESSMENT OF THE STATEMENT X**



Unlike the previous two figures, based on Fig. 9, it can be seen that more than a half of respondents graded the statement on the diversity and innovation of the sporting event programs as good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory, giving grades 1, 2 and 3 (Stat. IX). Only 8% graded this statement as excellent, which suggests that the employees are eager for change and fresh sport offer on SPENS, which is clearly not present at the moment. Based on Fig. 10, it can be concluded that the overall score of planning and organizing sporting events, where very good grade is dominant (over half respondents), following with grade 3 (every fourth respondent), while other grades are not common (Stat. X). Thanks to this kind of assessment, a relatively positive overall score is visible by the employees of the sport management of SPENS, which is encouraging, considering the many problems stated.

CONCLUSION

SPENS is a multifunctional complex where numerous major tourist and sporting events take place (as well as many other), both national and international so it is an important part of the Novi Sad and Serbian sporting event tourist offer. The building is one of the biggest centers of such type in Europe and it is an institution which covers several sectors or units for different individual and team sport competitions and trainings, with a great potential for commercial marketing, hospitality industry and space for cultural and media content. Some of the biggest national sporting events took place in this building, which positively affected the building reputation as a host to major sporting events. Apart from having numerous sporting facilities and events, SPENS is also famous for its business and entertainment facilities. During the survey distributed to the employees in the SPENS sport management, there were 25 respondents and the research goals were to examine the employees' attitude on many components of the realization of sporting events and defining the current problems and potential solutions, in order to improve the Novi Sad and Serbia (sport) tourist offer.

Summarizing all of the conclusions, it can be ascertained that the complex is immensely significant for sport and recreation of the Novi Sad citizens and its visitors, raising the level of physical exercise and improving the offer with the facilities and events in the whole country. It is a fact that SPENS is facing numerous problems and obstacles in order to become an undisputed center and a leader in the Serbia sport offer, but the company has and it will make an irreplaceable part of Novi Sad citizens' daily life and the center of numerous city events and the gathering center for all generations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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